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ABSTRACT

This study compared the help-eliciting capacity of 4 helping conditions. Within each condition a male confederate dropped in the path of an oncoming pedestrian either 5 books, 5 coins, a glove (unwittingly), or a book (while the confederate was on crutches). The percentage of subjects helping ranged from 3 to 100, depending on the condition. The results were interpreted as supporting the proposition that the probability that a person will offer assistance to a stranger in need of help approaches certainty under conditions of low costs and high dependency and high personal responsibility. In addition, there was no evidence of sex differences in help-giving; however, there was some evidence that children are more likely to help than adults. (Author)

WHEN DO PEOPLE LEND-A-HELPING-HAND?[1]

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The purpose of this field experiment was to explore the conditions which maximize the probability that a person will volunteer his assistance to a stranger who is in need of help. Virtually all experiments on altruistic behavior employ need situations which tend to induce moderate degrees of help. A moderate help-eliciting situation is necessary in order to provide for the possibility that the dependent variable of help can change with variations in the independent variable, e.g., situational variables and trait variables. Yet, as one would expect, there are circumstances in which the likelihood of help approaches certainty and others in which it approaches zero.

Recently Schwartz (1970b)[3] has suggested three preconditions necessary for personally held norms of altruism (e.g., norm of social responsibility) to influence behavior: (1) an individual must recognize that another person is dependent on him, in the sense that his actions have consequences for the welfare of the other person; (2) the individual must assume personal responsibility for the welfare of the other person; and (3) the individual cannot anticipate that he will incur high costs as a consequence of helping the other person. There is substantial evidence in support of Schwartz's analysis. In general, research indicates that altruistic behavior is positively related both to the dependency of the person in need of help (e.g., Berkowitz & Daniels, 1963; 1964) and to the personal responsibility of the potential helper (e.g., Latané &

Darley, 1969; Schwartz, 1970a) and negatively related to the costs involved in giving help (e.g., Midlarsky & Midlarsky, 1970; Wagner & Wheeler, 1969). On the basis of Schwartz' analysis (1970) and the experimental evidence, it is proposed that when both the dependency of the potential recipient of help and the personal responsibility of the potential helper are high and the costs involved in helping are low, the probability that a person will lend-a-helping-hand is at a maximum.

The present study included four helping conditions. Within each condition the independent variable was similar--a male confederate dropped an object or several objects in the path of an oncoming pedestrian, consequently, providing the predestrian with an opportunity to help by picking up the dropped object(s). In all four conditions the pedestrian's personal responsibility was high and the potential costs were low, thus, fulfilling two of the preconditions postulated to be favorable to the elicitation of altruistic behavior. However, the dependency variable was manipulated so that in two conditions there was a state of high dependency and in two conditions there was a state of low dependency. High dependency was achieved in one case by leading the pedestrian to believe that the confederate was unaware that he had dropped a glove, and intervention on the part of the pedestrian was necessary in order to prevent its loss. In the other high dependency condition the confederate was on crutches, thus creating a situation of high physical dependency. On the other hand, in the other two conditions dependency was low because there was no apparent reason why the confederate himself could not readily retrieve his dropped possessions.

Since in the two high dependency conditions personal responsibility

was high and anticipated costs were low, the preconditions were optimal in terms of predicting an altruistic response. Thus a high percentage of subjects would be expected to help in the two high dependency conditions, whereas in the two other conditions, due to the low dependency, a smaller percentage of subjects would be expected to help.

In addition to testing the above hypothesis by comparing the help-eliciting capacity of the four helping conditions, within each helping condition male-female and child-adult differences in help-giving were investigated.

Method

Subjects

The subjects were 136 male and 133 female pedestrians whose estimated ages ranged from 6 to 75 years. A pedestrian was not selected as a subject if there was another person within 40 feet and/or if both of his hands were occupied so that it was difficult for him to render assistance.

Procedure and Helping Conditions

The experiment was carried out on streets in the vicinity of major shopping districts in Windsor, Ontario, a city of 200,000 inhabitants. Experimental trials were run between 11:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. on week days and Saturdays during the period from mid-March to mid-April. The experiment was carried out only when sidewalks were dry, and each condition was run on both Saturday and weekdays and in March and April.

Two male confederates (ages 23 and 30) were used. They were similar in height and weight, and both dressed in casual attire--a jacket and plain slacks. Each confederate participated in approximately

half of the trials in each experimental condition.

Within each condition the following basic paradigm was employed: The confederate walked on the right side of the sidewalk. When the subject was approximately 10 feet away, the confederate dropped an item (or items) to his left side, thus confronting the subject with an opportunity to help pick up the item(s). The exact nature of the helping situation was varied according to one of the following four experimental conditions: (1) Books. The confederate dropped five of seven books which he carried against his left hip. (2) Coins. The confederate withdrew a handkerchief from his left pocket and, in so doing, dropped two quarters and three nickels. (3) Glove. The confederate carried a book and two gloves in his left hand. He let one glove drop, feigning unawareness of his loss. (4) Crutches. The confederate walked along on a pair of crutches with a book tucked between his left hand and crutch. (Besides the crutches, there was no other indication that the confederate was physically handicapped, e.g., he was not bandaged.) He let the book fall to the sidewalk. In all of the conditions the confederate pretended that his dropping of the item(s) was inadvertant. Also, in all but the Glove condition, having dropped the item(s), he stopped immediately and hesitated for approximately two seconds before bending over to pick it (them) up. All conditions were carefully rehearsed by the confederates to insure the appearance of authenticity.

On every trial an observer followed the confederate at a distance ranging from 60-100 feet. After a trial the observer and the confederate independently estimated the age of the subject, and the average of the two estimates was recorded by the observer. The observer also recorded

the sex of the subject and whether the subject gave help or not.

Results

A subject was considered to have helped if he picked up the confederate's dropped possession in the Glove and Crutches conditions and at least one of his possessions in the Books and Coins conditions. Help also was defined in the Coins condition as pointing out the location of the coins for the confederate (commonly done by older subjects) and in the Glove condition as calling the confederate's attention to his loss. Although an offer to help originally was designated as a helping response, none of the subjects made such an offer.

Of the 269 subjects, 71% were estimated to be 20 years or older (mean of 45), whereas 29% appeared to be less than 20 years old (mean of 14). Because of the small number of young subjects, inter-condition differences and sex differences were investigated only for the adult data. Table 1 summarizes the percentage of help given by males and females in each condition.

Insert Table 1 about here

Inspection of Table 1 indicates that there is a marked similarity in the percentage of help that was given by males and females within each condition. Chi square analyses verified that there were no significant sex differences.

The male and female data were grouped in the analysis of inter-condition differences. As indicated in Table 1, the percentage of help for the various conditions was as follows: Books, 3%; Coins, 23%; Glove, 97%;[4] and Crutches, 100%. An overall chi square indicated

a significant difference among the conditions in the percentage of subjects who helped (χ^2 = 135.42, df = 3, $p < .001$). Two-way chi squares indicated that significantly less help was given in the Books condition than each of the other conditions--Coins (χ^2 = 5.86, df = 1, $p < .02$), Glove (χ^2 = 83.86, df = 1, $p < .001$, and Crutches (χ^2 = 63.25, df = 1, $p < .001$). Also, less help was given in the Coins condition than in the Glove condition (χ^2 = 62.88, df = 1, $p < .001$) and the Crutches condition (χ^2 = 44.91, df = 1, $p < .001$). There was no significant difference between the Glove and Crutches conditions.

Although the number of subjects in the sample who were estimated to be less than 20 years old was relatively small, a rough appraisal of child-adult differences in help-giving was undertaken by comparing the behavior of those subjects under 20 years with that of those 20 years and older. As with the adults, 100% of the children (3 males; 4 females; mean age of 16) helped in the Crutches condition. In the Books condition 14% of the children (12 males; 10 females; mean age of 13) helped in contrast to 3% of the adults, however the difference was not significant. Similarly, there was little difference in the percentage of help given by children (91%; 10 males; 12 females; mean age of 15) and by adults (97%) in the Glove condition. However, the data from the Glove condition were re-analyzed by classifying as help only instances in which the subject actually picked up the glove for the confederate (i.e., calling attention was excluded). When this was done a significant difference (χ^2 = 5.08, df = 1, $p < .05$) was found, showing 59% of the children compared to 29% of the adults picked up the glove. A significant child-adult difference (χ^2 = 4.81, df = 1, $p < .05$) also was found in the Coins condition, wherein 48% of the

children (20 males; 13 females; mean age of 13) helped, and 23% of the adults helped.

Discussion

On the basis of the theorizing of Schwartz (1970b) and supporting experimental evidence it was proposed that when both the dependency of a potential recipient of help and the personal responsibility of a potential helper are high and the costs involved in helping are low, the probability that a person will lend-a-helping-hand is at a maximum. It was suggested that in each condition because there was no one else near enough to help, the subject's personal responsibility was high. Also, in each condition the costs involved in giving help were low, although they appear to have been somewhat greater in the Books and Coins conditions in which several items were dropped, requiring a greater expenditure of effort and time on the part of a helping subject, than in the Glove and Crutches conditions in which a single item was dropped. However, only in the Glove and Crutches conditions did the confederate present a state of high dependency on the subject. In the Glove condition the subject was led to believe the confedrate was unaware that he had dropped the glove and was primarily dependent on him to prevent its loss. In the Crutches condition a situation of high physical dependency was manipulated. On the other hand, in the Coins and Books conditions the degree of dependency was low because the able-bodied confederate easily could retrieve his dropped possessions.

Therefore, it was suggested that only the Glove and Crutches conditions fulfilled all three of the preconditions posited to be necessary for maximizing the likelihood of an altruistic act. Consequently, it was predicted that the Glove and Crutches conditions

would yield a high rate of help, whereas the Books and Coins conditions would effect less help. The results support the prediction. Among the adult subjects 97% helped in the Glove condition and 100% in the Crutches condition, whereas only 23% and 3% helped in the Coins and Books conditions, respectively.

The fact that all the subjects, regardless of sex and age, helped the confederate on crutches is a noteworthy finding. It might be added that undergraduate social psychology students, under less well controlled circumstances, replicated the Crutches condition in downtown Detroit, Michigan and found that 24 out of 24 black adults and 22 out of 23 white adults picked up the book for the confederate who in every case was white. The amount of help in the Glove condition was almost as impressive as in the Crutches condition. Thus, the results of this study suggest that in a low cost, high dependency, high personal responsibility situation the probability that a person will lend-a-helping-hand to a stranger in need of assistance is extremely high, and high, apparently, regardless of the background characteristics of the person.

The higher rate of help in the Coins condition than in the Books condition probably also can be attributed to the dependency variable. When the coins were dropped they scattered about, making their retrieval more problematic than the recovery of the dropped books.

One must be cautious, however, not to conclude that a single variable, such as dependency, invariably is more critical than the other variables. If dependency is held at a high level and either personal responsibility is low or anticipated costs are high, the likelihood of help also is less than maximum. For instance, the effect of increasing costs is aptly illustrated by comparing the results of the Crutches

condition with those of a study reported by Darley and Latané (1970) which was done in New York City and in which a male confederate on crutches approached a single individual. Unlike the present study, the confederate's left knee was heavily taped, and he fell to the ground, clutching his knee in great pain. Forty-one percent of the subjects helped in LaGuardia Airport, and 83% helped in an underground subway station. These percentages contrast with the 100% help given in this study. Since in the Darley and Latane study and in the present study both the subject's personal responsibility and the confederate's dependency were high (it appears that dependency was even higher in the former study), it is suggested that the major variable accounting for the lower frequency of help in the former study is the costs involved in giving help. Certainly the costs, in terms of effort and time and risk of embarrassment and further involvement, were greater for the case of the fallen confederate than for the case of the confederate who dropped a book.

With regard to the investigation of age differences in altruism, most studies have been restricted to research with children (for reviews, see Krebs, 1970 and Bryan & London, 1970) which tends to support the view that altruism increases with age, at least through age 10. Only a few studies have considered age differences among adults (e.g., Schwartz, 1970a; Gaertner, 1970), and apparently none has been reported which has compared the helping behavior of adults and children. The present results show some tendency for people under 20 years to be more likely than older people to help a male adult. A greater percentage of younger subjects than older subjects helped in the Coins condition and also in the Glove condition when the definition of help was limited to actually picking up the glove. A number of

plausible, but not necessarily incompatible, interpretations can be suggested. For instance, role theory might suggest that children are expected to be especially helpful to adults, and a costs explanation might suggest that the act of retrieving the dropped item(s) was easier for the younger subjects than for the older subjects. Whatever the interpretation, further exploration of child-adult differences in altruistic behavior seems warranted.

The absence of significant sex differences in helping behavior is consistent with the findings of most laboratory investigations of helping in nonemergency situations (for a review see Krebs, 1970) and, in particular, consistent with the findings of other field experiments (e.g., Darley & Latané, 1970; Schwartz, 1970a), although there are exceptions (e.g., Gaertner, 1970). However, there is evidence, especially from research on helping in emergencies (Piliavin, et al., 1969; Schwartz & Clausen, 1970), that when there are males present, sex roles are engaged, and females defer responsibility for helping to the other sex. Perhaps the conclusion that females generally are as likely as males to engage in altruistic behavior should be restricted to situations in which males are not present.

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Footnotes

[1]An earlier version of this paper was presented at the meeting of the Canadian Psychological Association, St. John's, Newfoundland, June, 1971. The authors thank Lawrence Gray, William Libby, and R. Robert Orr for their helpful suggestions during the preparation of this paper.

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[3]The present experiment was completed in the spring of 1969 before Schwartz (1970b) published his analysis.

[4]It is possible that some of the subjects failed to help in the Glove condition because they did not notice that the glove had been dropped.

TABLE 1

Percentage of Help Given by Male

and Female Adults in Each Condition

Condition	Male	Female	Overall
Books	0 (18)	5 (20)	3 (38)
Coins	24 (21)	23 (31)	23 (52)
Gloves	97 (35)	96 (27)	97 (62)
Crutches	100 (17)	100 (16)	100 (33)

Note.--Number in parenthesis signifies sample size.